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**THE BEQUEST OF
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1918

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GUENEVERE

GUENEVERE

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

By

STARK YOUNG



THE GRAFTON PRESS

NEW YORK

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**"longe quos simul a domo profectos
diverse maria et viae reportant "**

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KING ARTHUR.

GUENEVERE, his wife.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

SIR GAWAIN

SIR MORDRED

SIR AGRAVAIN

SIR GARETH

} nephews to the king, and brothers.

SIR KAY, the seneschal.

DAGONET, the queen's page.

MORWENA, the abbess at Boscastle.

AGATHA, a sister.

LYONE LE BLANCHE

YGRAINE

ENID

} ladies to the queen.

TOR, COLGREVAUNCE, PELEAS, IDAWC, BORS, URIENS, MELIAGRAUNCE, CADOR, BREUSE, PERSAUNT, BLAMOR, URRE, knights of King Arthur's court; a woman; other minor persons.

GUENEVERE

"Quanto la cosa è più perfetta
Più senta il bene e così la doglienza."

ACT I

A wood near Mordred's castle. A path runs across; on the right side the big rocks stand; on the left the ground is less broken. It is the first day of May, the wood is all green, and the wild flowers blooming. There is a sound of running water, and many birds sing in the trees.

Enter SIR MORDRED, SIR AGRAVAINE, and SIR GAWAIN.

Mordred

Curse those little feathered devils, all
The trees are full of them, singing as if
The air were silver sweet with feast bells,
And the world were sweet, and life sweet and free
From hate.

Gawain

Come, come, my lord, let the birds alone, their notes
Are sweet and limpid like the lives of simple
Men in this world

Mordred

Aye, squeeze your stale morals from nature, brother,
For every weather a mood. As if she had
Not planted in our bloods the heaviness
Of hate, as I do hate Sir Launcelot,
And scorn the white-souled Arthur.

Agravaine

And I do hate this lusty knight.

Gawain

Brothers, brothers, stint your noise. Ye know
And well that had Sir Launcelot not proved
Himself in our behalf, we had been by now
Full cold at the heart-root. He hath saved us all,
And many a time, has wen —

Agravaine

Small matter that. He hath a joy in heat
And struggle.

Gawain

Small matter very like, and men do hate
The objects of their own ingratitude.

Agravaine

Daily and nightly he is with the queen.

Gawain

Ye know it not.

Mordred

Aye, do we. And the king is shamed —

Gawain

Nay, nay, spare that, you care not for Arthur, 'tis
Some privy hate you bear the queen, or grudge
Against Sir Launcelot.

Mordred

Tush! 'tis all prattle. Lend me your ear, good brother.
Come, think you not in any of us three
Were stuff for a king?

Gawain

Thou king? Said I not so? Shame, Mordred, shame!

Agravaine

Nay, nay, brother Mordred, 'tis the general cause
That moves thee, 'member that, the general cause.

Gawain

Be not so busy, I pray you, for of this
Will the whole realm be mischieved.

Mordred

Fall what may, what I have said I have said.

Gawain

That I believe, for thou hadst ever a tooth
For all unhappiness.

Mordred

King Arthur hath consented to this plan
To take the queen by force and lie in wait
For Launcelot to rescue her.

Gawain

Take the queen, thou sayest?

Agravaine

Then some romantic hour to catch the two
Together.

Gawain

Take the queen?

Mordred

Hist! here's two — the first is Idawc
Of Cornwall; 'tis your poetical,
Gapes-at-a-ballad cub — he'll be with us.
And old Sir Kay, sour as curds. (*Enter Idawc and Sir*

Kay) How now

Fair lords? We speak of the widening reft betwixt
The king and the queen, what think you?

Kay

'Tis a great tangle, this marriage knot.

Gawain

The king consents? To snare the queen?

Mordred

Consents, though we had nigh not brought him to it.
He hath a deeming strong as ours, but shuns
The outcome of such publishment of falseness
In the heart of the realm. 'Tis a dreamer, and his world
Peoples itself with airy shapes, and stretches
Rapt vistas for his eye to travel in,
Conversing with visions. They say he hath
Small ear for the queen, but hourly weigheth him
Some cloud-vast enterprise or famous venture,
So that his kingdom is his spouse and not

The queen. To him she is fair womanhood,
The finer element within the scheme,
And not a woman. Therefore being human —

Idawc

True, dost thou —

Kay

True, most true. It is no king men see,
But is a mist.

Idawc

Dost thou remember once at harvest time —
'Twas at the dying twilight, and the moon,
Drowsily waking from the dusky east,
Did shed a glamorous vapour o'er the water.
Bargemen hither, thither ran to light
Their torches, music strummed, and on the bank
Thronged with embarkings for the river pageant —

Agravaine

Came what — well, what is't at the pageant? Here's
No time for fooling, youth.

Idawc

Why, on a barge sheathed all in golden samite,
We saw the white queen like fair summer wings
Upon a lotus flower. There apart
Stood Arthur musing, chin in hand, or gazed
On the stars, and sad dim space, as he would read
Their meaning. Lo! one said, "Seest not the queen
Upon yon barge, my lord?" Arthur turned
Where she did beckon him to look on her,
And said, "White hue on yellow, sure some sign,
Fair virtue thus surmounteth jealousy."
So killed all joyaunce with his moral carp.
But Launcelot beheld her as a vision,
And cried, all dazed with her loveliness,
"God's life, thou'rt fairer than the heaven!"

Kay

Odds, by my beard, 'tis past my patience.
What woman cares to prate of attributes,

Of whys and wherefores and such moral twaddle?
These axioms be poor pudding for their stomachs
When they might hear men sing their beauty's praise —

Idawc

Fie, my lord!

Kay

Fie not. The king is blinded with star-dust,
For once I ventured: "If thou thoughtest more
Of this same fleshly world, my lord,
'Twere better haply for thee and for it."
Said I, "There's holiness as true, I wis,
About the humblest, rushlit cottage door
As at the Portal of the Starry Lamps.
Men's souls need human fellowship to ripen
Them for God, as many twigs do lift
Higher the flame." Methought in that
I was fair eloquent —

Mordred

And he — mark me it was some ponderable
Stuff he spake —

Kay

He turned and said, "Here in this life the soul
Is solitary and yearns ever toward
The Solitary, the Great One beyond."
Meaning somewhat I dare say, for he bent
Upon me his wide-dreaming eye
Till I was wildered with their steady burning.

Mordred

Come, 'tis no time now for remembrances.
Soon come the knights to hear our plot. They will
Lend hands, for ever trouble-brew draws men.
From diverse causes —

Gawain

Aye, some like me for stubborn certainty
Desire to prove at all costs what they know.

Agravaine

Be not too sure.

Gawain

For some men rather would be sure and die
Than live in midst of doubtings. Ah how,
How if this cause splits brothers thus, will all
The court be rent!

Mordred

Some for gain —

Gawain

Aye, you will reward them, brother.

Mordred

I did not say so.

Agravaine

Leave wrangling, they are at hand.

(Enter knights, Sir Bors, Sir Uriens, Sir Tor, and others.

All wear blank shields.)

Mordred

Good morrow, fair knights! The time doth press, come,
come,

Ring me round here, and let me speak our plan.
Who here knows not the shame that flares at court,
Open as day? Think not the king deceived;
He hath a deeming, but he is full loth to speak,
Seeing how oft-times Sir Launcelot hath served
The king and the queen and saved their worship.
And if we take not Launcelot with the queen
And make accusal, you know the accuser must
Prove't on Sir Launcelot himself; the which
No living wight hath yet done. But if
We take him —

Meliagraunce

But, my lord, how may this be done?

Mordred

Peace, and I will tell you. This day
Is the queen's maying, and even now she rides
To woods and fields. With her come ten of the Queen's
Knights,
Who ride thus ever near to her, and joust

For her, and wear no manner of arms but hers.
They shall be dressed in green and white, and go
Gathering herbs and flowers to deck themselves
For maying. There'll be songs —

Meliagraunce

Well?

Mordred

Well, I saw them start, and they shall come
This way, and we will take them.

(Confusion.)

Nay, nay, stir not, nor mutter discontent,
But hear me. We will take the queen and hers
To my castle hard by, she will send in secret
Unto Sir Launcelot and he will come.

Meliagraunce

Aye, he will come, mark you he will come!

Mordred

Aye, he will come. We'll seem to yield, then take
Him later with the queen. The king himself shall
see it.

Agravaine

Sir Launcelot will come to rescue her,
The king shall be brought, and we shall catch our birds
Together.

Kay

Here's Cador and Breuse linked arm in arm, and drunk
As always. 'Tis strange they lack preferment
At court. Now sure 'twill not be long for them,
Such worthlessness could never fail to be
Rewarded by the state. Sir Breuse hath bound
A tavern garland on his brow, and look,
Cador hath him a bread-cake for a shield.
(Enter Cador and Breuse.)

Cador

Steady, steady!

Breuse

Steady! We go to make a kingdom now.

Cador

Aye, we be statesmen, and 'twere well to walk
Straight.

Breuse

'Tis a hard matter.

Cador

Keep hold on me, and 'twill be well.

Kay

Aye, that's politic. Ho! young sops,
What is't in the air?

Breuse

'Tis a new king I scent, methinks.

Mordred

We have no time for them, come, come! Doubt not
But we shall catch our birds together.

Gawain

Catch them together — how? Think you the queen
Will bide an hour longer than need be
In thy black walls?

Mordred

That I do. Sir Launcelot hath pained
Himself too much already on her part,
She will keep low to 'scape the scandal. That,
Or we can hobble up her knights that they
Will not depart so speedily. The queen
Will not desert them methinks.

Gawain

Scandal!

Mordred

Aye, scandal, 'tis the eye of the matter.

Cador

Scandal, what is scandal?

Kay

'Tis piety with a bit of news to tell.
A fair garland thou hast, my lord.

Breuse

To keep my memory green, belike.

Kay

The fruit of the vine is within, is't not? A gallant
Shield hast thou, Cador. 'Twill keep off death.

Cador

Truly it may be.

Breuse

Nay, nay, eat not thy defence, brave lord. Stand up!

Kay

'Twere more avail to swallow thy spear, methinks.
'Twould help thee stand.

Breuse

Art thou the king, Sir Mordred, yet — yet?

Mordred

Silence, thou muddled fool. Not yet, nor ever!

Breuse

I went to say I could not worship thee.
I serve the fallen angel that the priest
Told me of, naming him not.

Mordred

Angel?

Breuse

Wine, 'tis a fallen angel.

Knight

Keen-carved, Sir Garland.

Kay

Sure one would listen at thine ear as at
A sea-shell for the empty roaring.

Mordred

'Tis no time for such chaffering. Get them aside,
Good Sir Kay, stop but their noise and I
Were much beholden to you.

Kay

'Twould merit somewhat. Come, ye princely wits,
Let me but tell my latest dream — 'twas that
A shower of wine will fall this Friday next —

Cador

Wine! Haste thee, Breuse, find one that hath a moat

To sell. Good Sir Kay, tell more!

Kay

Come then and I will satisfy you. (*They go to the left of the stage.*)

Gawain

My lords, let me speak.

Agravaine

Nay, hear him not, my lords, for he had rather
Corruption bred and rotted at the court
Than he should stir his sluggish feet in struggle.

Knight

Craven! Fie!

Second Knight

We'll hear Sir Gawain.

Cries

Sir Gawain! Sir Gawain! Fie! Craven! Sir Gawain!

Gawain

Hear me briefly. My lords, it is a grievous
Thing to wreck a good man's fortune. God
Will break the evil. Therefore have we no need
To avenge the king. That Launcelot is false ye
know

Not yet, but know if he be found so what
Will fall on us. Shipwreck and storm and split —
Arthur is king, but Launcelot hath lands,
Hath bournes and territories of huge extent
Here in this island, and doth own a realm
In Fraunce, castles and followers. Let but
Discord raise her head between them two,
And this demesne of Britain will be rent
In twain, racked and overwhelmed; the fellowship
Of the King's Round Table broke, the noblest face
And form of chivalry be felled and gutted
In a civil strife. And if in truth —

Agravaine

Hurry, man, art thou old Nestor come
Back from Hell, and windier than ever?

Mordred

True, brother. Come closer, Sir Knights, and ye
Shall see the better justice of our plans. (*They with-
draw to left.*)

Kay (on the right)

Calm thee, calm thee! Spare thy words. The world
Hath deafened itself already with much speech.

Breuse (mounts a rock)

I'll be a king, have I not a crown?

Kay

But little in it.

Cador

Brains were not missed in a king, good sir. He is
My friend.

Breuse

I will be an historical king, and marry
Me three wives.

Cador

Nay, sweet friend, when thou art king, wed not.
King married is not king, but the queen's husband.

Breuse

Weep not, thou mayst serve me.

Kay

Aye, listen yonder.

Gawain

If Launcelot doth then love the queen, hath he
Not championed her more than the saintly Arthur?
If still ye head on this I say I am
Not with you, and depart.

Bors

Nor will I hear your tales, nor share your counsels.

Blamor

Nor I be traitor 'gainst the noblest knight
In all the world.

Mordred

Wilt thou take hence that two?

Gawain

Glad were I. When they be sober they
Will give me thanks.

Kay

Go, Cador, and thou Breuse, this man hath found
A fishpond lately dried. 'Twill hold thy wine.

Cador

Come, come, good Sir. What is't to Friday? (*Exeunt
Gawain, Breuse, Cador, Bors, and Blamor.*)

Agravaine

They are like some fishes, my lord, and dread the light.

Kay

Let Launcelot and the queen be caught.

Knight

Ho! Sir Kay, 'tis the cream, the cake of solid
Sense.

Mordred

Silence, I pray you.

Kay

Have I not told the king to tread on Earth?
Answer me that.

Agravaine

Yea, yea, greybeard.

Kay

Once Sir Launcelot changed mail with me
And saved me at a venture. Odds, at my
Best feasts they cannot eat for love. I had served
Him for his courtesy — leave out the queen —
And I had fed him fat as the Duke of Dutchmen.

Agravaine

Rattle your keys, Sir Kay, instead of your tongue,
Your jams are sweeter than your words.

Kay

Sweeter for thy tongue haply; for it
Hath tasted of more jam than of wise words.

Tor

The shame burns deep, the purging of the court

Will uplift all the realm and bring to bloom
Again the chaste flower of the earlier days.

Persaunt

Nay, I dare swear my lady's purity. Be the truth
As it may, shame unto a man that speaks
Shamefully of a lady and a queen.

Agravaine

You wear fresh flowers, youth, but they will fade.

Cries

I am against this thing. Let it be tried. Cowards!
And I!

(Confusion, and taking of sides.)

Mordred

Thus is the whole court rent to many minds,
The venture is dangerous.

Agravaine

Nay, speak to them with that tongue of thine and they
Will follow —

Mordred

Fair lords, young knights full of the noble fire
Of youth, put up your swords, hear me!

(Confusion.)

Knights

Sir Mordred! Fie! Cowards! Sir Mordred!

Mordred

My lords, none of us would the queen took hurt
From this we go to do. Think ye not so.
The thing is this, doubt like a hidden mould
Eats up the peace of the court — sure the thing
Touches us all equally. Certain
Evil would I rather choose than blank
Uncertainty.

Knight

And after she is ta'en, my lord, what then?

Mordred

Then I will feign hot love for her, and threaten
Masteries. Sir Launcelot will come

And we shall see what door the wind blows in.
(*There is the sound of talk and laughter.*)

Agravaine

They come.

Mordred

'Tis too late but to prove the thing as planned.

Persaunt

Would I had kept out of this.

Kay

Too late for temperance after the lips are wet.

(*Exeunt all, biding themselves behind rocks and trees to the left. Enter the queen with twelve knights and three ladies, all in green and white, wearing wreaths and bearing garlands of flowers.*)

Guenevere

But leave, good sirs, this hunting talk
Of falcons, jesses, leash and lure, there's love,
We have not spoke of that, and it is May.
Sing, my lord, one of the songs you learned
In your knave service at the court.

Gareth

'Tis but a kitchen song, my lady, sung
By humble wenches at ring-time.

Guenevere

Sir Knight, if thou wert armed, I'd send thee back
To bring me water in thy helmet all
This way, as penance for thy dulness.
Cannot the humblest woman sing her love,
My lord? Love maketh any woman as
A queen, I pray you sing.

Gareth (sings)

The white-thorn blossoms blow,
And sweet buttercups in the grass,
Go woo, my lad, go wooing!
In winter frosts the blood is slow,
But lusty May makes every lass
Come smiling to your wooing.

Weave marigolds within your hair,
Go woo, my lad, go wooing,
For spring makes all the lasses fair
And ready for your wooing!

Guenevere

'Tis a fair chaunt. Sweet season hath ever sweet song.
Lo! there a little woodland pool, rimmed round
With crocuses, and tangled water-flags,
Here shepherd's purse and vetch and meadow-sweet —
See how the blue sky lieth in it — come —
And now a cloud sails by. This is the time
When maids may learn what manner of fortune waiteth
Them, and who their knights haply may be.
Therefore Lyone and Enid and Ygraine,
Bide with me here. And ye, Sir Knights, shall leave
Us and go on a little space ahead,
And one by one each maid shall search the pond
For her fate's image.

Lyone

Thou too wilt read thy glass, wilt thou not, my lady?

Guenevere

Nay, nay, I am an aged dame, and all
My ships are in already. Seest thou not
The furrows in my picture there?

Lyone

'Tis but the ripple from the rushes breaks
Thy feature, else 'twere fair as the flowers mirrored
Near the marge.

Guenevere

Ah, flatter me not, child, 'tis youth alone
Hath still its bright sails growing on the horizon's
Verge, flocking like gulls, the crafts of hope.
Now do ye listen to this play of fortunes.
Sir Knights, ye shall go on, nor dare look back,
And when that ye are gone, one of these maids —
But ye must know not which — shall watch her here
In the water for her true love's face to look

Over her shoulder. Meanwhile ye shall
Draw lots to find which knight returns. 'Tis he,
By the faith of this blue pond, shall be her lord.

Gareth

Go now, my lady?

Guenevere

Yea, but go not too far. And he that wins,
If he be wise, will hasten back

To meet the fair eyes laughing in the pool

(Exeunt knights to left.)

I will take me three petals thus and tear

In one a rent — thou seest — and ye shall choose

One each, and she that holdeth the torn leaf —

Wit ye 'tis the pierced heart — 'tis she shall watch

First in the pool. Choose quickly. *(They choose.)*

Ah, Lyone le Blanche, my lily maid,

'Tis thou; then kneel thee here, one comes.

Child, thy fair hair mingles its pale gold with the
crocus

Flowers, and is as fair as they. Hist!

*(Enter Sir Colgrevaunce. He comes and looks in the
pool.)*

Lione

Sir Colgrevaunce!

Colgrevaunce

Lione!

Guenevere

Fie, fie, Lyone, thy cheeks are flame, and thine,
Sir Knight!

Colgrevaunce

'Tis but the stooping.

Guenevere

Ah nay, now I do swear these eyes have met

For love ere this. 'Tis a pretty jest to bribe

Beforehand Mother Fortune thus. Ye shall plight

Your troth with rush-rings from this friendly bank.

Go now, my lord, send others to assay.

Colgreannucc

God send another such good grace as mine.

Guenevere

Now, Enid and Ygraine, choose ye from these

Two petals, as but now ye chose. Who has't?

'Tis thou, Ygraine? Then kneel. (*Ygraine kneels.*)

Ygraine

Ah, Jesu, keep me, my lady, some reptile stirs

The slime beneath and muddies the whole pool.

'Tis an ill omen, I will not read my lot

To-day. (*Rises.*)

Enid

Nor I. See, all is foul, 'tis an ill omen.

Guenevere

Think you? I will not say these signs are true

Or false, seeing we know not what be hid

From the eye of man. Yet I like it not.

Ygraine

Still it muddies, I will not look!

Guenevere

Then let us leave it and go on. (*They start out to the left.*)

Enid

What noise was that, the sound of bosses clanking

On armed heel?

(*Enter Mordred and the knights. The latter have their visors down.*)

Mordred

Good morrow, madam.

Guenevere

My lord, you know this is the first of May,

When men's souls like the white clouds float in dreams.

What means this froward battlement of steel

At such a time? Out of my way, I like it not.

(*The Queen's Knights have come up on the left; commotion off the stage in that direction.*)

Guenevere

Hold yet, my knights, 'tis useless, ye have no shields.
If my lord Arthur or Sir Launcelot
They, if they were here, would teach thee how
To budge, thou caitiff Mordred.

Mordred

Aye, but our lord Arthur is not here,
Nor thy Sir Launcelot. If either were,
Who knows what he would do? So I will speak.

Guenevere

Speak then and go.

Mordred

Hear then and stay. 'Tis long that I have loved thee,
And passing well, and have long eyed my time.
This day I have thee, and thou leavst me not
Till thou dost love with me, or I and all
These my men-at-arms be dead. Come
To my castle near, come willingly, for come
Thou shalt, whether thou wilt or no.

Guenevere

Hast spoken?

Mordred

Aye, madame, for the nonce.

Guenevere

Then this is my answer. Your love and you I spurn
Out of my path like offal. Know, Sir Mordred,
I had liefer cut my throat in twain
Than love with you. Who these be, for there
Are knights among your menials here, what men
Of my lord's these be, that lend their hands to you
And do preserve this vile incognito,
I know not, but *what* they be I know,
Vile dust to which your spittle gives a mould
And shape, without it, formless atoms.

Mordred

Slow, madam, slow, your hot words cannot sink
In my cold ears.

(Off the stage to the left, the Queen's Knights break nearer through the ranks of Mordred's men.)

Colgrevaunce

Ho, we come, my lady!

Mordred

Back, puppets.

Gareth

Way there, cowards!

Guenevere

Nay, nay, ye are not armed!

Peleas

Whether we die or not we care not, so

We keep thee safe.

Colgrevaunce

We care not! On, on!

(Confusion increases off the stage to the left.)

Guenevere (aside to Dagonet)

Go boy, go Dagonet, go, take this ring,

Watch thy chance and go. Give to Sir Launcelot

This ring, and pray if he would ever see

My face again, to come and succour me

From shame. Go, spare not thyself!

Lyone

O Jesu in heaven, help thy knights!

Guenevere

Stay, stay your blows!

Mordred

Stay your blows.

Persaunt

Stay your blows, fools!

Guenevere

The most valiant are as chaff before armed baseness.

And this I know, good men have naught to fear

Save only cowards. Therefore, Sir Mordred, slay not

My knights. I will go with you if you hurt

Them not, and bring them to my prison,

For I will slay myself if they be not

In presence while I am with you.

Mordred

For your sake, madam, it shall be done. But where
Is Dagonet, the page? Nay, madam, you
Have played me false. Give the boy chase, you two,
(*Aside*) But do not stop him. Let there be litters
Made, and bring these wounded after us.

(*The queen and her ladies go out with Sir Mordred and
his party. The wounded knights are borne on litters
made from the shields and spears. Sir Agravaine
remains. Enter Sir Kay.*)

Kay

Come you not with us, my lord? We wait.

Agravaine

No, I will bide if haply the page returns here.

Kay

How will it end? Think you Sir Launcelot
Will come?

Agravaine

Think you 'twill ever rain again?

Kay

There'll be wild deeds to follow this day's work,
Sure man's devilry doth pass the devil;
And thy brother hath outdevilled Hell. I'll no
More o't, but get me home.

Agravaine

Go plan a feast, 'tis suited to thy wits
Some better than these plotted policies.

Kay

Belike 'twere better for thee too. The realm
Were safer then. And sure thy brains and belly
Are all one. (*Exit Kay.*)

Agravaine

Sour but sharp likewise. 'Tis no noodle head.
(*Enter Dagonet running.*)

Dagonet

Gone, oh, my lady!

Agravaine

Stop your whimpers, cub, have you found him?
Speak, fool!

Dagonet

Yea, my lord, at the edge of the wood, he had
Already got word of mischief to the queen.
And hither gat him armed.

Agravaine

He comes?

Dagonet

Close behind, my lord, there! there's his breastplate
Flashed through the trees — there! my lord.

Agravaine

Ha, ha, the broth thickens, come, come, shag-head.

Dagonet

There, my lord!

(To the right is heard the sound of a galloping horse.)

ACT II

A day later. One of the chambers in Sir Mordred's castle. The wounded knights lie in the adjoining room to the left. On the right is a window with bars. A flight of steps outside leads up to the door at the back. The room has a canopied bed, tapestries, and armorial ornaments. Below is the sound of hammering. Dagonet sits by the window. Sir Colgrevaunce stands by the window.

Colgrevaunce

Dagonet, what means that knocking?

Dagonet

They mend what wreck Sir Launcelot wrought.

Colgrevaunce

On yesterday?

Dagonet

Yesterday, my lord, when he came here

To succour my lady. In he rode and smote
Thrice with his spear, and the hinges groaned.
And he smote down the door, and stoutly thrang
Amid the press, hewing about from right
To left, until Sir Mordred came and yielded
Him in terror, and granted the queen's release.

Colgrevaunce

You saw it, boy?

Dagonet

Yea, did I. Some day may Jesu grant
That I may be a man, even such a knight
As our Sir Launcelot, and serve some lady
Like the queen.

Colgrevaunce

The lad dreams. Right, thou art in the orient
Of life, and at that hour the daylight's hue
Is golden.

Dagonet

I do not know all thou sayst, my lord.

Colgrevaunce

But why lingers the queen here? To still
The shame maybe. Let her then tell,
She cometh now?

Dagonet

Not yet, my lord.

Colgrevaunce

Haply she will tell us when she comes.
Hither, boy, and tell us more of this
Late prowess of Sir Launcelot's. Shut to
The door, the wind from yonder casement blows
Too much over the floor here.

(Exeunt Dagonet and Sir Colgrevaunce. Enter Sir Mordred. He makes a circuit of the room, and examines the bars of the window.)

Mordred

I'll seem to hesitate. 'Twill make him like
A goaded horse by mad leaps lead himself

To mishap — there's jealous prying for you.
Yea, my lord, the chamber is vacant, come.
Too fast intent to hear. 'Tis sport to watch
This greatness with its single view and aim,
And keen half-sight, steer for its end, all blind
To the rest. My lord, 'tis vacant here. Come!
(*Enter King Arthur.*)

The queen is in the courtyard with the hounds
And falcons, the birds' flight seems to charm her.

Arthur

'Tis fair without, and yet methinks the air
Hath lost the nipping flame that spurs the blood.
'Tis stale and heavy. I like not the red
Streak in the west, nor the dun mound over it.
Knows naught, poor wretch, of what draws over
her.

'Tis a poor, weary, foolish world where we
Blow in like wind, ruled by dark outer forces,
That floods the hollows and low places here
On our globe, and lo! is gone again.

Mordred

Nay, nay, my lord, naught ever came of dreaming.

Arthur

Sir Mordred I repent that ever I
Did lend mine ear to this. A grievous hurt
To me and mine will fall of it if she
Be false. If she is not, then all this shame
Were undeserved of her.

Mordred

Then give it up, my lord.

Arthur

Nay, we have gone too far now to draw back,
Yet I do repent me. You were
Too forward in it.

Mordred

It was not I, my lord, but those behind
That pushed me on as kinsman to yourself,

Saying the court reeked with the stench of the queen's falseness.

Arthur

There's foulness in thy words, I like it not.

Mordred

'Twere best forgotten all. Why should we credit Vile slander. Thou knowest —

Arthur

I had some warning of this same thing once
From Merlin, the wizard, long before I took
The daughter of Leodograunce to wife.
But when I saw her I did heed him not.
Still, whether she be false or true, I will
Not swear. To me she hath been ever fair
And gentle, and to my knights and to all ladies,
A queen among women and a woman among
Queens. And that Sir Launcelot loves her
I dare say. He hath succoured her from danger,
As when —

Mordred

But she, my lord, loves she him?

Arthur

Whether she loveth him I will not say —

Mordred

Thou wilt not say. Men say that thou striv'st not
For certainty, loving the peace of thy court
More than thy wife and honour.

Arthur

Thou holdest well the evil said of me.
Whether she loveth him or not I will
Not say. God hath given him fair seemliness
Of form, and hardness to work so largely
That he hath had always the better in combat.
And she hath a heart passionate and wild,
But yet her soul beats high —

Mordred

Nathless ere this have men said that they took

Long draughts of love together.

Arthur

Her lofty soul yearns toward the heights, she fain
Would keep the purity of the court,
And love Sir Launcelot as soul loves soul,
But then her eye takes fire at sight of him,
Her veins surge hot with the glory, colour, pomp,
And beauty of this world,— the mortal strife
'Twixt flesh and spirit, which hath won I know not.

Mordred

My lord, I speak, methinks, as should become
Your nephew, and I am but an unwilling
Mouthpiece of mine ears.

Arthur

It is an old lie.

Mordred

Yea, my lord, an old lie, and I
Do doubt it altogether.

Arthur

It is a lie.

Mordred

Yet there be whispers in the court.

Arthur

And 'twould be well to prove it false.
What whispers?

Mordred

About Sir Launcelot and the queen, my lord.
Men say that when Sir Launcelot departs,
She in her secret bosom writhes and welters
Like a mad woman, though she give no sign
Outwardly to men.

Arthur

She is the queen.

Mordred

Aye, my lord, and bears it with a proud
Countenance, as though she felt no fears
Of her love, nor scented her own peril.

Arthur

She is the queen.

Mordred

Only last night, but 'tis a lie —

Arthur

What is a lie?

Mordred

My lord, it is a lie I blush to tell.

Some caitiff swore Sir Launcelot to have come
Here to the queen, even last night.

Arthur

Came here? God's life!

Mordred

Be calm, my lord, my men slept 'fore the door,
He could not enter there, nor by yon threshold
Where the knights sleep. There is no place
Save the window here and that is barred.
And —

Arthur

Why did you start, when your hand touched the bar?

Mordred

Did I start, my lord?

Arthur

Aye, and broke off your speech. Why do you hold
The bar as if you fear to fall?

Mordred

Hold the bar, my lord?

Arthur

You trifle with me, dog, playing parrot thus!

Mordred

Put up your sword, wild man. I would save you
Even at this last moment. Some hand
Hath torn the bar out of its place, and all
Its fellows likewise have been set loosely
In notch again.

Arthur

My brain scorches. Let me but wait with thee,

Good Mordred, till the end.

Mordred

Come, we cannot wait here.

(Mordred takes down the torch. Exeunt. The chamber is dark.)

(The door from the knights' chamber opens, and the light streams into the room. Guenevere stands at the door. Lyone, Enid, and Ygraine are with her. Dagonet carries a lighted lamp and a torch. The ladies have their lamps still unlit. Sir Colgrevaunce follows them in, and stands near the door.)

Colgrevaunce

My lady, I do speak for them that here
Lie weary past all standing with their wounds.
We ask why stayest thou here within these walls?
They slime with falseness.

Guenevere

Well may you know that 'tis not any love
For this foul place that keeps me here, 'tis dread
Lest word of this should come to the king and new
Strife rise, now through me. This poor realm is
Already like to flame a holocaust
From courtly feuds and smouldering ashes, dull
And waiting to be stirred, kindred hates
And new-old grudges. Pray God none come
By me. Therefore when you are come with me
To Camelot and the court, speak not of this
Black, treacherous deed, but 'scape the noise and scandal.
Three days let us bide here as if we came
By chance into this castle of Sir Mordred's,
Where entertainment proffered pleased us so
That we must needs remain to bask in it.
Meantime the hours will pass —

Knight (in chamber to the left)

Nay, we shall be shamed, they are traitors all.

Colgrevaunce

Nay, the queen hath judged aright, 'tis well.

Let Mordred sour now, uneasy, crafty,
Brewing discontent, better this cloak
To hide his guilt than some new war in Britain.

Guenevere

Here too my knights lie wounded in my cause,
Think you I will forsake them thus? Not so,
But I will take them with me hence to-morrow
If they be strong enough. If not I bide.

Knight (in chamber)

'Tis half the world's mishap lies in that word
To-morrow.

Guenevere

Ye lack nothing, fair knights? Then sweet sleep
Visit your eyelids all the night long. God
Gave sleep for brave men.

Knights (in room)

Jesu keep thee, my lady.

Colgrevaunce

They are already half asleep, my lady,
And my brain muddles strangely since I supped.
Here within is the tankard we drank from —
It was a sleepy draught. Think you 'twas drugged?

Guenevere

I know not. Wherefore?

Colgrevaunce

Mine eyes are lead — aye me, my heart is heavier
With some foreboding. 'Tis foolish surely,
But I do feel that if I sleep I shall
Not waken.

Guenevere

'Tis but the wound in thy arm. Set down the cup.
Good night.

Colgrevaunce

Good night. God keep thee, my lady, good night.
(*Exit.*)

Guenevere

'Tis a strange drowsiness, would God I had it.

Lyone.

I have it not either.

Guenevere

Ygraine and Enid, ye have wearied much
This day, and thirst for the sweet mead of dreams
In the cup of sleep. Lyone le Blanche, my fair
Lyone, thy head hath need of resting-place,
Though thou know'st it not. For love in the heart
beguileth
Like the sea-air.

Lyone

Nay, madam —

Guenevere

Ah, tell me not, have I not loved? Now do
Thou kiss me here on my brow, for I have strange
Shadows on my soul to-night, and I
Have need of woman's love. Wherefore I know not,
But my heart is sad.
(*The three ladies light their lamps at hers, and kiss her
forehead as they go out.*)

Enid

Good night, and a long sweet sleep to thee.

Ygraine

Good night, and the honey of dreams to thee, my lady.

Lyone

Nay, I protest, though I do love
I fain would stay with thee, my lady. I have
No need of sleep.

Guenevere

Ah, nay, go to thy pillow, child. There, there,
I kiss dear rest upon thy brow. Do I
Not know, have I not loved? (*Exit Lyone.*)
God, have I not loved!

Dagonet

What hast thou done, my lady?

Guenevere

'Tis nothing. Smother those sconces, Dagonet.

(*He puts out torches by the window.*)

Dagonet

How beautiful thou art, my lady, thou
Art like the meadows.

Guenevere

Like the meadows — how, child?

Dagonet

Why, now 'tis summer in the meadows, so
For thee it is the summer of thy beauty.
Beauty hath her seasons like the air,
Hath she not, my lady?

Guenevere

Haply.

Dagonet

Her spring and summer and autumn —

Guenevere

And winter. True, very true! Boy, canst thou sing?

Dagonet

'Twill be sung badly, for I am not gay
To-night. Art thou too sad, my lady, yea,
Thou'st said it. Last night I could not sleep,
And while I tossed in wakefulness I heard
Knights clatter in their sleep; one leapt out
Of bed, one dreamed he grasped a naked sword.
It bodes no good, my lady. And this eve
At dusk I saw big knights in the outer courtyard
Polishing their mail, and all the squires
Busily set. What doth it mean, my lady?
It bodes no good.

Guenevere

Ask me not, boy. Take down thy harp
And sing. Not loudly, 'tis late. Rouse not
The happy, happy souls that can lie down
And sleep. (*Aside.*) If I were with him always, were
It well? Nay, passion feedeth on itself,
'Tis mastery of self that bringeth water
For the old stain.

Dagonet (by the window, sings)

Look out, my lady fair, and see
The lustre of the night,
The moon beneath her canopy
Sails beauteous and bright,
The hawthorn bough swings to and fro,
The nightingale sings low, sings low,
Look out, my lady fair!

Look out, my lady fair, —

Some cloud eats up the moon, I cannot sing.
See how the shadows grow, and now the wind
Gins rise. Dost hearken?

Guenevere

Thou'rt fanciful. Stir some low murmuring sound
Among thy strings, to bear thy song to me
Like distant burthen on an evening wind.
'Tis well — now come the gentle syllables
Slipping like pearls upon the lovely thread.

Dagonet (sings)

Lean out, my lady fair, and hear
The twitter of my lute that wings
My heart to thee —

Madam, I hear noises 'neath the window,
Rattle of pebbles and scratching 'gainst the walls.

Guenevere

It was some bed-sore knight in yonder room
Turning to rest him. Thou art sleepy, go,
Nay, go, good night.

Dagonet

God keep thee well, and make thee a good night,
My lady.

*(Exit Dagonet. Guenevere draws the bolt after him, and
fastens other door.)*

(Enter Sir Launcelot at the window.)

Launcelot

On yesternight to show my love for thee
I tore out of their sockets these iron bones,
Strove with might to show my love.

Guenevere

Ah, my beloved, I have set thee as
A seal upon my heart, as a signet ring
Upon mine heart have I set thee.
But yet, Sir Launcelot, my blood is heavy
With misgiving.

Launcelot

And mine. I know not wherefore I am racked
With dread. But now I did see black shapes hurtle
Thick upon the gust; the wind doth reek
With pests and fevers, rank and rotten fogs
Come from the sloughs. This stinking of the air
Liketh me not. The stars are stubborn, all
This darkness here is much too thick.

Guenevere.

'Tis so. But now the moon shined clear, now she
Is gone. The morbid air doth suck up humours
From the glens, a death-sweet perfume that
But half doth please me. The heaven is silent,
And round the world the mantle of the dusk
Cloaks heavily. What noise was that?

Launcelot

It was the clock at the postern gate that smote.

Guenevere

What hour, didst thou take count?

Launcelot

Eleven, my lady.

Guenevere

Think you it a lucky hour?

Launcelot

Nay, I know not, but I —

Guenevere

My lord Sir Launcelot, it was a hapless

Hour that ever we twain met together.
I 'member me the day thou first didst come
To Camelot and the jousts. Ah, we were young —

Launcelot

And I did lack my sword and would have been shamed
Hadst thou not brought it to me wrapped in thy robe.

Guenevere

And I did see thee fight so strong and seemly.

Launcelot

And I saw thee, Queen Guenevere, saw thee,
Fairest among all women and all queens.
And then as the rising moon looms like a white
Fire from the world's edge, flaming into heaven,
So burned up love through all my veins.

Guenevere

And as the streams of Araby do nurse
The myrtle flower, and the wind and the rain lead up
Till it bursts with prisoned sweetness, so hath love
Opened my heart. And yet to-night have I
Fears lest no good will come of it.
How often have we made our promises,
Made prayers to the cross that never more we fall
In deadly sin — Alas, Sir Launcelot,
An 'twere not for this earthly taint, thou hadst
Succeeded in the quest.

(The sound of wind and distant thunder without.)

Launcelot

Yea, madam, I had seen the Sangreal
But for this stain to blot it from mine eyes.
Once I saw a great clearness in a chamber,
And in the midst a silver table held,
Covered with red samite from my sight,
The cup that bore the blessed blood of God,
With many angels singing nigh. And then
The holy vessel of the Sangreal passed,
And the fire smote me in the visage that
I might not see, but only stand, my poor

Eyes hungering, my nostrils filled with the sweet
Savour round. For never did I battle
For God's sake, but only to win worship
Or be better loved of thee.

Guenevere

Many a night —

(*Thunder. Guenevere goes to the window.*)

The aspect of the heavens groweth perilous.

Launcelot

How sweet is hearth and fellowship on such
A night. Together —

Guenevere

Aye, frightened children cowering with dread.
Hark to the bellowing elements! Methinks
'Tis all the wrath of the world met here to-night.
Look how the wind heaves darkness past the window!

Launcelot

Come from the lightning's reach. 'Tis well. What was't?
Many a night, thou saidst?

Guenevere

Many a night, Sir Launcelot, have I
Lain in the castle of silence, when, slowly
Dropping dew-like round the eaves of sleep,
Came dreams and separate lives. And then I saw
That other life our younger visions painted.
Ah, one soul liveth many lives, my lord,
During our days' short span. Without this taint
The purity of the court were still unbroke,
And still unmarred were chivalry and worship.
But from our love I fear me there will come
Downfall and woe to many.

Launcelot

Grieve not thus o'ermuch. Dost not know well
God pardoneth all things sooner than despair?

Guenevere

Methought there must be holiness somehow
When soul drinketh up soul for love. Somehow —

But since it may not be, we needs must grieve
And make but mournful cheer.

Launcelot

Not so, for all the quest and hoped-for heaven!
Surely God wearies of repentant wretches,
And the prostrate flesh of wailing men cumbers
The path of the world too much already.
Let me stand up till I be dead, I cry,
And if I sin I have eternity
To bide the punishment. I loved thee, thou
Art near me —

Guenevere

Beware! Thou dost o'erleap thyself, as ever
At the moment's heat. Yet I do love thee sure
No whit less that thou canst forget nice counsel
In fond madness. Reason speaks to reason
But unto heart only the heart can speak.

Launcelot

Heart calleth heart.

Guenevere

But who knows not man's heart is but Fate's tool.
And somewhere in the depths of space our separate
Fates call to each other through the void,
And draw them near.

Launcelot

Let us not reck of Fate!

Guenevere

And life sweeps by us like a wind of flame,
While we do wait unseeing in the caverns
Of Fate, like blind things in the sea-caves.

Launcelot

Alas, why looms the shade of Fate thus on thee?

Guenevere

I heard strange stories long ago amid
The leaping shadows of my father's hearth
And sea-hawks echoed from the haunted crags,
And oft the dreaded of my Danish forebears,

Wyrd, great goddess of Fate, hath loomed on me,
Hath beckoned out of her marble mist, O Christ,
And I draw on but cannot read her face.
And 'yond her sitteth Darkness in the road.
O God, if Fate be in thy hand, let her
Not come upon me yet!

Launcelot

Nay, nay, thou art o'erwrought — who knows but I
May drive Fate back from thee with might of love?
Man's will is half his destiny.

Guenevere

She hath loved long the nations of the North,
Sea-king and thane, how if she wait their daughter?
How if e'en now she smote me from the sun?

Launcelot

Thou'rt rapt!

Guenevere

Lo, at the window there, 'tis she!

Launcelot

'Tis what?

Guenevere

Wyrd! 'Tis Fate! See you not her face
There in the blackness? Do I not know thy face,
Thou Hell-Queen? Now do I learn its feature!
Spare me, O Christ, Christ may not spare me from
thee!

Launcelot

'Tis frenzy come upon thee!

(Clamour without. Gauntlet strikes door.)

Nay, Thou'st said it!

(Thunder and wind. Flashes of lightning.)

Voices (without.)

Ah, traitor knight, we have thee! Come out! Open
to us! Ho!

Launcelot

Madam, is there any armour here that I
May cover my body 'gainst their numbers?

Guenevere

Alas, none, no armour here!

(Knocking and cries again.)

Launcelot

O God, this shameful cry I may not suffer.

Most noble Christian queen, if I am slain, good night,

And pray for my soul. Know well my kinsmen — they

Will save thee from the fire.

Guenevere

Nay, wit thou well, Sir Launcelot, if thou

Art slain, I will take my death meekly as ever

Did any woman.

(Knocking. Cries. Sir Launcelot gets a bolt from the window. They are battering at the door with a beam.)

Launcelot

Leave your dashing, cowards, and I will set

Open the door.

Mordred's Voice

As well ye may, traitor, for there be men

Here against all odds.

Voices

Eight! Twelve! Score!

Guenevere

Nay, have I not my knights? 'Tis strange they

Stir not at such clamour.

(She opens the door to their chamber.)

Launcelot

'Tis no matter.

Guenevere

Sir Colgrevaunce! Sir Gareth! Ho! Wake, wake!

They wake not, O God, they wake not,

'Twas the tankard! Oh, treachery!

(Sir Launcelot opens the door wide enough to admit one man. A big knight pushes in. Sir Launcelot fells him with the bolt, draws him in, and fastens the door.)

Launcelot

Off with his armour, help, madam! Do thou

Dash out the torches here when I am gone.

(Outside there is an astonished silence. Hammering and cries again. Sir Launcelot, now armed, opens the door and rushes into their midst. They fight on the stair and in the corridor. Guenevere has put out the torches. Darkness broken only by flashes of lightning. Mordred rushes terrified into the room, followed by Agravaine, whose helmet is broken off. They are revealed by a flash.)

Guenevere

Ah, God, Sir Mordred!

(He is unbolting the door to the knights' chamber. She snatches the great tankard from the floor and hurls it.)

Coward, have that for thee!

(Lightning. Mordred has escaped. Agravaine lies on the floor.)

Dark! O God, dark! Oh, alas!

Who is it there that draweth nearer me?

Hell, is it thou revisitest me once more

To-night? Nay, it hath armour! Speak!

No armour but a mantle, speak, oh speak!

Thou wilt not speak — I know thee! Oh, oh, oh!

(Enter Sir Launcelot with torch. He places torch in sconce by door.)

Launcelot

What woe is this? Thy cry hath roused the very
Falcons in the mews.

Guenevere

One touched me in the darkness! I am mad!

'Tis naught. Art thou hurt?

Launcelot

Nay, but do faint with dealing blows. Calm thee,
Calm thee! Thou shalt not come to harm. Hear
The wind moan!

Guenevere

How if the king knows not what hath befallen?

'Twere fond to think they would not tell him.

But he is just and blind — and yet 'twas Fate
That came but now to my window.

(Footsteps without.)

Launcelot

Some knight returns to —

(King Arthur stands in the doorway.)

Guenevere

Jesu Mari, it is —!

ACT III

The throne-end of the council-hall. The throne at the back to the right is under a blue canopy, spangled with gold, the whole elevated on a dais. To the left are arched doorways leading to the courts. Bells are ringing. Two knights on guard.

First Knight

'Tis the third bell for the court.

Second Knight

Aye, the trial of the queen hath caused delay

In opening the tribunal.

(Enter Sir Kay.)

First Knight

The queen will be tried, then, this day. What hast
Thou heard in the matter, Sir Kay?

Kay

Ask me not. Are mine ears then carrion dumps?

Second Knight

Much both false and true, methinks. Men say
The queen would fain stay at the court, holding
Her present station. There are two ways open: one
To bide here as queen, the other to depart —

First Knight

With Launcelot to Joyous Garde?

Second Knight

Aye, with Launcelot.

First Knight

Then she is traitress to the king, sayest thou?

Second Knight

Men say it.

First Knight

And the king?

Second Knight

This treason hath power to stir a sea that tops

The very promontories of men's souls.

First Knight

Life were not dearer than her station. 'Twere

Better she be dead than queen no longer.

Second Knight

Few there be that will arm to speed the queen's death.

First Knight

Few. Not I.

Second Knight

'Tis a dark hour.

Kay

Carp, carp! What then, what would ye have? Wrong

Or right, the queen hath courted hazards, wooed

Mishaps. Can one head think for the world? Once

I said to her: "Look, madam, look to your road!

Whatever your thoughts be of wrong or right,

The world goes on its destined pace, and where

You err 'tis you that fall. And men sing on

Though your poor ears be stopped with death."

Second Knight

Forgotten of men, that were the tragedy

Of death methinks.

First Knight

All may not be so wise as thou, Sir Kay.

Kay

All do not try.

Second Knight

I have spoke more of question than of what

Mine ears have gleaned about this buzzing court.

Mark you, Sir Knights, mark you, and mark you well,

Mark you the queen will be forgot in the bloody Strife that follows on this day. I have An inkling of Sir Mordred's schemes. Mark you, The queen will be forgot. First Sir Mordred Strips Sir Launcelot's forces from the king, Then he revolts. His eyes are green long since.

First Knight

True. There is wind of it very like. 'Tis through The queen he strikes the king. Were she not here He'd find another way.

Second Knight

Guenevere had eyes that saw ere this, wherefore Hath she been blind and sightless in this treachery?

First Knight

She hath a sorrow of her own, poor lady, Bleak winter yelling round her troublous heart.

Second Knight

They say the queen is contrite.

First Knight

I know not if her mood be so, my lord.
She seemeth as one grieving for the end
Her deed hath wrought, but holds not shame nor sorrow

For the deed, feeling that heaven in some deep way
Doth justify this love and madness.

Second Knight

I understand not such things, but I know
That men may do these things, but women never.

Kay

Faugh! 'tis rubbish. Thus my cook will say
"Bread must be so, and cake be thus, or they
Will never rise." I tell thee 'tis all rubbish.
Leaven is leaven, and fire, fire! And men
And women burn and rise and fall, as bread
And cake, alike. 'Tis rubbish but 'tis men's

Philosophy, I look not there for sense.

Second Knight

Here comes Sir Launcelot, and his kin with him
Stepping with his steps.

(*Enter Sir Launcelot, Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, Sir Urre, and others.*)

Bors

All your kindred and their followers
Do stand without, ready and armed
If there be need. We drank your wine with you
When fortune ran it, and now we will drink water.
Your will is ours —

Launcelot

Most noble kinsmen, I am much beholden
To you. Give me your counsel, for if ever
Man needed it, 'tis I at this time.

Bors.

My lord, this calm of thine is well —

Launcelot

'Twas spoken idly — what is counsel now?
Who thinketh I will let harm light on her
Doth know me not. No red drop brims at my
Heart's fountain but doth run for her.

Urre

And we are strong —

Launcelot

My sword hath rived in twain men's flesh ere this!
For every sorrow laid on her I will
Set wells of blood running in this vile court,
And many filthy, lying mouths will set
To eating up their ordure! Spread wreck' —

Bors

Hold, my lord, the king comes.

(*Enter King Arthur, Sir Mordred, Sir Gawain, Dagonet, and the court. Few are armed. Arthur sits. Mordred and his party take their place on the right of the throne.*)

Arthur

My lords, good morrow. The queen comes not yet?
What justice is there to be rendered?
For the king must needs judge timely and wisely though
The man hath vitals tortured on the rack.

Gawain

My lord, here is a man whose fields are waste
And grain downtrodden by your last assay
Of hunting.

Arthur

Enough, enough, you shall be paid. Sir Kay,
Look to it.

Kay

Aye, my lord, pay, pay, we are always paying.
(*Enter Cador and Breuse, drunk.*)

Arthur

'Tis out of form and reverence that ye come
Thus here, muddled with wine.

Cador

'Tis out of form and reverence what we have
To tell the king. 'Tis somewhat for thy ears.

Arthur

Speak, then.

Cador

Last night before the feast, in a dark place —
Some say the dark is devilled — before the cups
At the feast, I heard two speak together.

Arthur

What said they, good fellow?

Cador

Thou heardest it, Breuse, what was't? I cannot think.
My lord, I wake not early thus all days.

Breuse

I cannot think. Sure the place was dark,
And they spake ill.

Arthur

Spake ill?

Breuse

One was a kinsman of the king.

Arthur

Kinsman?

Cador

High-voiced and hot.

Arthur

Who? Cudgel thy brains, who?

Breuse

Who, sweet friend?

Cador

Speak, thou leanest heavily! Leave rocking,
Thou art not the ship of state.

Breuse

'Tis thou, thou weight. Speak!

Arthur

Take these two hence, Gawain. Kinsmen? Spake
ill?

Mordred

'Tis naught, my lord. It is a drunken fancy
Now I do think me, Dagonet did sing
A ballad of King Mark's black treachery
Against Tristram his kinsman. This same tale
Is but the coinage of their drunken ears
From the same song.

Arthur

Treachery — did they say treachery?

Mordred

Spake ill, no treachery.

Arthur

Didst thou sing so, boy?

Dagonet

Not I, my lord.

Mordred

'Twas then another.

Arthur

Very like, 'tis naught. Let us begin again.

Gawain

Here is a woman, lord, whose husband scorns
And beats her like a dog.

Woman

My lord, King Arthur, by your leave. I loved
This man with a mad, woman's love, and he —
My lord, he loved me. But he spurns me now,
And flouts me in my face. He hath struck me
And I bore with that, cursed me and I took that,
But he hath wronged me, and I will —

Arthur

Wronged thee? He hath wronged thee?

Woman

Yea, shamefully.

Arthur

Calm thee, calm thee, thou wretched broken wretch.
Thou shalt have justice, there is much too much
Of wrong done in the world.

Woman

Nay, I would not have him hurt, my lord.

Kay

Aye, that is the way of woman. Pardon me,
My lord Arthur, I must speak — 'tis wisdom.
Woman, if thou dost love a man, and fain
Would keep his love, show not the excess of thy
Affection and feed him well. Man is a brute
To be held by the muzzle and not by the heart-
chords.

Arthur

Ho, Sir Kay, thy words o'ershoot thee, man,
Thou hast been seneschal so long that thou
Dost think all things concerned with food.

Kay

If I am cynical of men, my lord,
'Tis this.

Arthur

'Tis wherefore?

Kay

My lord, I have seen them eat.

Gawain

Here is another woman who hath wrongs

She cannot tell —

Arthur

So have we all, woman.

Gawain

She wears her wits awry.

Kay

'Tis no new ailment.

Gawain

My lord, she hath —

Herald

The queen, make way for the queen!

Arthur

Woman, thou shalt return.

(Enter Guenevere. A noise of cries and wailing comes from the outer courts. Guenevere takes her stand at the left of the throne. Launcelot comes nearer to the front.)

Arthur

Madam, there are charges here to-day
Imperilling thy life and Launcelot's honour.
What noise dins in the court?

Gawain

My lord, it is the people making dole,
And wailing lest the queen be burned.

Arthur

Lay it, such clamour is unseemly.

Launcelot

My lord, let me speak.

Arthur

Ah, Sir Launcelot, Sir Launcelot,
Thee have I loved in gone days passing well,
And now thou hast cast sorrow over me.
Once I mind me, 'fore mine eyes were weary

Feeding on their dear faces, thou didst take
My knights on the Quest of the Holy Grail, and
ne'er

That goodly company met whole again.
But now thou hast done worse and ta'en away
More than my Round Table. And thou hast edged
Treachery 'twixt me and thee.

Launcelot

Hear me, my lord.

Cries

Hear him, hear him! Hear him not! Sir Launcelot!

Gawain

My lord, go slow. To lose a noble friend
Is like a loss of the dear life, is such
A loss; for a man's friends are his life.
Go slow, a day may show the evil, but
The time is longer that makes manifest
The good.

Arthur

Doth baneful Fate will thus that we must see
To understand, be blind to act? Oh, would
That I were blind in this. For well I know
That now indeed is my whole kingdom mischieved.
(*Cries without.*)

There will be war, Sir Launcelot, now, 'twixt me
And thee, thy blood and my blood, cruel strife,
Tearing the vitals of this realm. Mine arm
Is powerless for seeing what will fall.
Madam, I rejoice to see thee weep,
'Twere best wept sooner when there was some boot

Launcelot

Then I will out, willy, nilly. King Arthur,
I own the debt I owe to thee, for thou
Didst give me knighthood, and of thee
Have I had honour and much worship. Yet
In all thy quarrels have I lent what aid
I might in thy behalf, shoulder and heart

Have been thine, buckler and helm and sword,
Vassal and steed, been thine. Nor have I cast
Green eyes of envy on thy station, nor
Champed a restive bit, hearing thy fame
Exalted, as have some nearer of kin
To thee, I name them not.

Arthur

Why do ye glare on my nephew Mordred?
But 'tis naught.

Launcelot

But I did add
Ever what inches I might unto thy stature.
In all thy heat thou canst not yet forget
How many a venture have we had together
Of joy or woe. Therefore, my lord, for this
Old brotherhood, I pray thee think on me,
And judge not rashly.

Arthur

Yea, truly must I think on thee, yea, truly,
Bitter or sweet, still must I think on thee.

Launcelot

Nay, think what thou wilt then, on my soul I care
Not. I cannot sit as thou and weigh
Vantage 'gainst vantage, and knit prudence up,
Search whether 't be good or bad or what,
Teach mine eyes to rob their sockets of flight,
And stop mine ears with silence. 'Tis fitter work
For hermits and white hairs, not men. I know
No honied speech nor do I value aught
The slippered dalliance of the favoured few,
But strike with this arm what harmeth me or them
I love. 'Tis many times I championed her
Whilst thou sat dreaming high emprise or plan
To win wide rumour for thy name. Thinkst thou,
God's life, I can no longer wield this sword?
'Tis blood for blood, hate for hate thou'lt have?
She is the queen, who then shall judge her?

Arthur

Stay, Sir Launcelot, thou art mad in thy heat.
'Tis hot blood that hath cost thee dear ere this.

Launcelot

Thou knowst 'tis fellowship and humility
That kept me thine, not lack of realm or power.
Lands have I, kinsmen and followers,
And all are hers whom through me ye would shame —
Therefore show me him that dares accuse her.

Arthur

The clamour in the court increases.

Gawain

My lord, it cannot be stilled. Some there be
That think the queen condemned to be burnt, and
they

Bewail piteously her death. But some
Deem she is cleared of blame, and they do growl
And mutter underneath their breaths, and curse
Loudly this tribunal.

Arthur

But how if she be pardoned here?

(*Noise in Sir Mordred's party to the right.*)

Gawain

My lord, to my eyes, judging as best I may,
If she bide here there will be blood and strife,
Whether she be burned or pardoned. Either
Way is dangerous.

Launcelot

Nay, hear ye this, if she stay not as queen,
She shall not stay at all.

Bors

Yea, think ye we will let the queen be burnt?

Urre

To arms for the queen!

Arthur

Silence!

Cries

To arms, to arms! For the king! For Mordred! For the queen!

Arthur

Mordred? what cause is that?

Guenevere

I pray you, Sir Knights —

Cries

The queen speaks! Let us hear the queen!

Kay

Stop your gabble, fools, and hear the queen!

Voice

She hath been overlong silent now.

Arthur

Silence, she is yet the queen!

Cries

The queen! the queen!

Guenevere

I will put off thy crown and robe before

I speak in trial.

Arthur

Speak. 'Tis well!

Guenevere

Lords and vassals of this island realm,
Hear me speak. I will say briefly and
Have done. My lords, I am a woman, whom
The gods built bigger than their wonted mould,
Wilder, more diverse, waging fiercer war
And conflict 'twixt the good and evil. He
That hath pinions larger than the common flight
Must needs take greater pains lest they be sullied.
My lord Arthur, I have ever loved
Thee since I came from Cameliard,
My father's land, loved thee as men love saints.
Not with the petty pulsing of the veins,
Nor jealousies nor heat of mad desire,
But at the topmost of my soul's bent.

Arthur

Is that the love men ask of women — good men ?
I know not.

Guenevere

Since thou'rt ideal, they that love thee love
Thee as a mystic symbol, or a bodied
Soul of some dear thing, not as frail man.
Thou hast not known the low brown earth, nor it
Known thee. So wast thou ever loved, and so
Thou hast loved me, however much thou'st loved.
For thou knowst well, my lord, this is no husband's
Nor no lover's jealousy that moves
Thee in this sifting trial thus, but is
The jealous eye the king bends on the crystal
Perfectness of his long-dreamed-of court.
Thy kingdom is thy spouse, my lord, not I.
I fear I speak o'erboldly.

Arthur

Nay, 'tis no matter. Speak.

Guenevere

Then, ah, then —

Arthur

Well, well, then — ?

Guenevere

I have loved Sir Launcelot too. All the pomp
And glory of this world, of sights and sound,
Of summer air and downs of May, of stars
And white dawn leaping over dewy fields,
Of life and love and the little moods men know,
And bossèd arms, and chivalry, and jousts,
Of blood and wild, unquenchable revenge,
Of bowers drunk with music and sweet sound,
All this my woman's heart hath found to love
In him, Sir Launcelot. So have I loved
You both, but differently. Methinks that God
Hath placed in me such high, opposing tides
That if my soul be shipwrecked he could blame

Me not.

Arthur

Madam, me seemeth 'twas all love with you.
Were there not other things stirring at court?

Guenevere

The diverse uses of the world make men
Take love only as a part of the whole
Existence, but women — as a jewel liveth
By the light, so live women by love.

Arthur

Haply. And now?

Guenevere

Now — I speak not for the din.

Arthur

What if ye be our queen no longer?

Launcelot

Go with me, thou shalt go with me, my lady!

Arthur

Queen no more!

Cries

With Launcelot! Queen no more! With Launcelot!

Guenevere

Nay, nay, not Launcelot, let that have done.
Steal thou my crown, I go not hence with him
To Joyous Garde, to be his love. Nay, nay.
I will not so. Sure life turneth bitter
In the cup, and I must dash it from me.

Arthur

Where wilt thou turn if thou art queen no longer?

Guenevere

If he rescue me hence, know ye 'twill be
To the sisters by Boscastle. There shall I
Be buried from this world, and let my soul
Crowd with its persons my life's stage. But if
I bide here —

Cries

Thou'lt burn! Treason! (*Confusion.*)

Guenevere

Aye, leave your howling, poor lean curs,
Fattened with this man's collops. Ah! Sir Mordred,
Why hast thou been so keen to fill black sails?
Art thou the giant Jubauce or Goliath?
For I know well who set these on —

Mordred

Madam, I pray thee, I am all for peace.

Guenevere

Yea, very like, — my lord Arthur, look —
Thy dove of peace hath need of armour plate
Beneath his quills.

(She tears off Mordred's cloak. He stands in his breast-plate.)

Ah, cowards have ever need of steel. I leave
Thee now to them, kind leeches, they will suck
Thy veins dry to a drop. But who am I
That speak? *(She starts out.)*

Arthur

Nay, madam, nay, God's life, nay, dost think —?
Stay, thy cause must still be tried.

Guenevere

Queen no more. Aye, I have had my hour.
This hour my life hath spoken in full tone.
No more I strive in the world, for I am ashamed
Enough of men already. May I not
Go hence? I am all undone methinks.

Launcelot

'Tis I speak for her. Sir, what man shall judge her?
My lord kinsmen, close round.

(The kinsmen surround the queen. Exeunt. Mordred and his party follow. The crowd vanishes. Sir Gawain and King Arthur remain.)

Arthur

'Tis blood for wrong. Take sword and follow me.

Gawain

But first have brought thine arms, my lord, 'twere folly

Else to venture.

Arthur

Nay, God forearmed me in this matter.

Gawain

Give over theories —

Arthur

Hold me not, or I may do thee hurt.

Come, come, let the horn blow.

(The commotion without lessens. Enter knight.)

Knight

My lord, they have buffeted their way

Through the outer gate, and they are gone by horse

Toward Boscastle. The people cheer for joy

At their escape. Let make pursuit? Or not?

(A bell rings. Enter Sir Kay.)

Kay

My lord, Mordred hath seized the south tower, and is

In open rebellion.

Arthur

Oh, traitors all! Oh, traitor roof that falls

Not on this day. *(Flings off his crown.)* Into the dust,
thou ring

Of wretchedness! To arms! To arms!

*(A crowd pours into the room. Confusion. All the bells
of the castle are clanging.)*

Cries

To arms! To arms! To arms! *(Without.)* Mordred
for king! Mordred for king!

To arms!

ACT IV

Reception-hall of the convent on the cliffs near Boscastle.

*To the left, at the back, a flight of seven steps leads to the
cloister corridor, beyond which is the garden with a wall
and trees at the end. On the left, near the front, is a
prie-dieu with flowers and lighted candles. At the*

back of the room a kind of Roman seat, long, with a low back and arm-pieces. Benches on the right. Outside in the garden it is early dawn, and beyond the trees shines the golden sky. Save for the sound of the surge below, there is a great stillness over the world. Two novices enter, and light new candles on the prie-dieu. Enter SAINT MORWENA, the abbess, and with her GUENEVERE in white dress and veil. On her breast she wears the emblem of the Sacred Heart.

Morwena

Hast thou found peace, my daughter?

Guenevere

Yea, mother, as doth the moon, whose burnt-out sphere
Keeps one face turned to sunward, so
The dead globe of my life hath one side lit,
The other dark. I am pale grown and weak,
And my poor body hath forgot its splendour.

Morwena

There is another splendour in whose light
All flesh is grass.

Guenevere

Now my soul calls to me with a hundred
Tongues, the heralds of my spirit.

Morwena

Evil is no thing within itself,
But is a lacking of the vital good.
And of thy life what man is there shall judge
Save our sweet father, Christ?

Guenevere

Gentle brother Christ, father and brother.
'Tis like to something lived in sleep thou stirrest.

Morwena

Life is a restless sleep.

Guenevere

The dreaming king forgot me, and another
Loved me, and I loved him. That was my right
To live. Think you I should have starved the life

I had for some uncertain good to come?

Morwena

Belike that were not all of life, this love.
God gave man love to lead him out of self,
And upward —

Guenevere

Man's self and God, I know not where they meet,
Nor where they part.

Morwena

To lead us out of self and upward.
For all things do but school us to God's end.

Guenevere

Very like. Writ round the cell of our narrow lives
Are runes we cannot read. Our days are but
A footbridge 'tween two worlds — nay, I do speak
By rote, knowing naught. My brain doth lose the thread.
Once at the sacrament methought I saw
A figure in the likeness of a child,
And lo! his face shined bright as any fire,
And smote itself into the blessed bread.
I never had a child whose little hands
Had drawn me from the tawdry passing world
Into the mother's holy chamber. Nay —
'Twas only empty hours and cold hearth,
And young love beating at the door without.
Woe to the woman whose happiest days do come
To be the days she most laments.

Morwena

Thou hast thought much within these quiet walls,
Meditation is fair Solitude's
True sister.

Guenevere

Yea, thought much, and well, well have I paid
For the worldly draught my cup hath brimmed. And yet
Meseems that there are others that pay less
And sin far more. Some there be that sin
Vilely and often, and then forget it straight —

Morwena

Him that forgotteth God hath forgotten.

Guenevere

And the world forgets likewise and blameth not.

Morwena

Yea, they be fools that live their lives, and do
Perceive the truth as little as do spoons
Perceive the taste of broth. Their clouds and thine
Have different heights.

Guenevere

And some torture themselves for every little
Wrong, pondering their deeds, and the world
Curseth them —

Morwena

Yet they are blest, for they do meditate,
And he that thinketh truly cannot die,
But the thoughtless are as dead already.
He that is wise doth choose the thoughtful life
As a clever woman findeth the right colour.
Long is the night to him that cannot sleep,
Long is the journey to the weary man,
And long is the span of life to the foolish. Take
Some quiet hour at sundown in some peaceful
Place, and look about the vineyard
Of thy soul. The moon is silver clear by night,
The water glimmers in the sun, but be
Thou shining in thy meditation.

Guenevere

For some that is an easy thing, but not
For all.

Morwena

Aye, passion breaks through unreflecting minds
As rain through ill-thatched houses, so the sage
Hath written. Oh, what a fool is man that sets
His lips unto the brimming cup of passion.
It is a galling drink that kindles thirst,
And sates but with exhaustion. But thine

Is drained. Daughter, thou dost well to pray
And keep thy vigils, for to-morrow is
The day thou tak'st thy vows, is't not?
Then thou mayst wear the garb of peace always.

Guenevere

Yea, mother, take the vow relinquishing
All the vain idols of the world, to purge
My flesh of earthly desire, and strip my soul
Naked before God

Morwena

Bless thee, my daughter, I rejoice that thou
Art ready.

Guenevere

Ready —!

Morwena

Why dost thou stare and round thine eyes so, seeing
Naught?

Guenevere

Mother, I do fear I know not what
That yet may fall. Last night I had a dream.
And in it I did see a tournament
Of ladies fair and noble knights,
Whose spear-heads flickered when they moved like flames.
Then at the hurtling that did follow there,
All my wild blood boiled, and the strong, sweet taint
Of the world came back into my veins. How do
I know but having given up my worldly drink
I yet be ta'en athirst for Camelot and glory?

Morwena

Jesu defend me!

Guenevere

Then were I lost indeed, O God, if I
Do leave off woman and turn saint, give up
The world and cannot keep my heaven. Be neither
Spiritual nor fleshly, saint nor queen.

Morwena

Thou beatst too high, these words are wild. Let God

Choose for thee, daughter. Our hearts are frail
Barks for rough seas. Let God choose for thee.
(*The matin bell rings, the light of full day is in the garden.*)

Morwena

The matin bell. Go thou, child, peace be with thee.
(*In the cloister corridor the sisters are passing. Guenevere looks at them till they are past, then follows after. The abbess stands before the prie-dieu and crosses herself. Enter Sister Agatha.*)

Agatha

Mother, I cannot pray for watching her face.
Her soul doth seem to feed upon itself.

Morwena

How, child?

Agatha

The queen — there seems a clashing of two spheres
Within her frame. Last night I heard — thou knowst
Her cell is next to mine — last night the queen
Did clatter in her sleep, and clapped her hands
And cried out: "Ho, well struck! Avoid thy horse!"
And other speeches from the lists. Strange peace
For one that goes to take her vows so soon.

Morwena

She hath already told me of this dream.
What song is that?

Agatha

'Tis Dagonet, the queen's page. The lad
Is thoughtless to sing thus within these walls.

Dagonet (at the gate)

Look out, my lady fair, and see
The lustre of the night,
The moon beneath her canopy
Sails beauteous and bright —

(*Enter Dagonet.*)

Madam, there is a knight at the gate, I hear
His horse's panting — I saw him near.
Haply it is King Arthur come to see

My lady — ah, if it were ! — and behind, there
Southward on Tintagel Road, a cloud
Of dust like men-at-arms galloping. Haply
I may hold his bridle while he stays.

Agatha

The king ?

Morwena

King Arthur ?

Agatha (going to the corridor)

'Tis he. Madam, I will leave you. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter King Arthur.*)

Arthur

God keep thee, madam. The queen — ?

Morwena

God keep thee, my lord. My lord, I am an old
Woman, and I speak my thoughts. I fear thy coming
Is but poorly placed. To-morrow the queen
Doth give her vows, leaving forever all
The transitory uses of this world —

Arthur

Ere this, ere this, I had come had not the brawls
That broke out on the trial day kept all
The realm bestead. Sir Launcelot's falseness is
Forgot in larger woes.

Morwena

Where is Sir Launcelot ?

Arthur

Gone to his lands in Fraunce.

Morwena

And thou ?

Arthur

My mantle clingeth heavier than mail.
Now am I like a father whose one son,
The sole issue of his loins, is slain. At morn
He minds him of his son's going, and at eve
His coming. Seeth his heir's house wasted,
The chamber of the winds, where harp sounds not,

Nor any joy within the court as once.
Wherefore am I come to bid farewell
To her that shortly goes to take her leave
Of life. Once was she queen, and well I know
Of her and me that each shall not see other
More with fleshly eyes.

Morwena

I fear me lest the sight of thee will rouse
The red tide of her blood and kindle heats
To her soul's detriment. She cometh now.
Show her all reverence, my lord.
(*Exit the abbess. Enter Guenevere from the right.*)

Guenevere

My lord.

Arthur

How dost thou, my lady — and queen?

Guenevere

My lord, I have turned from the world's eyes that
Were bent so long hotly upon me. And thou?

Arthur

I — I, but 'tis no matter. I am come to say
Farewell.

Guenevere

Farewell?

Arthur

And pity have I more for thee, indeed
Since I have suffered, suffered humanwise.
And yet I do not blame, thou didst no more
Than I to bring the false dome down — no more.
Together we wrought havoc, thou with thy love
Loosing bonds not to be loosed, and I
Seeing men not as men but as symbols vague.
Star-gazing I did lose the earthly road,
And visionary flashes blinded me
That I knew not the common lives.

Guenevere

Such blindness doth tempt men as dark doth thieves.

Arthur

The man blindly good is good to himself
Alone — to others he is evil.
And dreamers should be dreamers for themselves
Alone — for plain men facts! And thou?

Guenevere

What boots it us to weigh one 'gainst the other?
I have fought the rich life-passion from my heart,
Pray God I turn not back to it.

Arthur

Yea, cleave to this quiet thou hast found,
Hug silence to thee, lest thou shouldst feel perchance
All the deep wrongs that men can do. Feigned love
That covers deep designs, ingratitude
And thankless greed, kinsmen at war,
Murder, rapine, blood, despair, and hate,
Trusts betrayed, and confidence despised,
I have felt them all — all. Truly
I have known the low brown earth, have bit the dirt.
Ah, madam, pray to God to leave thee here
Till Death shatters the flower of thy life.
(*There is the sound of horsemen without, and the noise
of arms.*)

Guenevere

What clangour is that?

Arthur

'Tis my horsemen, I did ride ahead of them
Some space.

Guenevere

Yea, my lord Arthur, all of life is not
This baseness that thou tellst me of. Are these
Then enemies of thine — nay, my lord, they follow thee
Far as the land lasts to the sea. I know
There be sweet human things in life for men;
The handclasp of old friends, and friends to share
Sadness and joy, old voices and old sounds,
Sunlight, and walled gardens, and wild moors,

Eye that readeth eye, and heart, heart —
Ah, my lord, there is more sweet than gall —

Arthur

Tell me not —

Guenevere

Or gladly we take the gall as well as sweetness,
For whether be the sunlight fierce or mild,
What man but fain would watch the shadow grow
And on the dial of his life mark time,
Rather than darkness and unhoured ways.

(Dagonet sings without.)

Ah, there is Dagonet singing a lay
Unto thy knights. It is an old song that,
And tells how Joseph of Arimithy came
Into this land. I have heard it oft at court,
At Pentecost, my lord, dost thou remember?

Arthur

Nay, I know not, madam, that time is gone.
And now farewell, I may not tarry, fare
Thee well. I know of thee and me that each
Shall not see other ever more with fleshly eye.
And now I must needs hasten and depart
Back to Camelot and the court and strife.
But afterward shall sail to Avalon,
And change my life from this world.

*(From the chapel come the voices of the nuns singing
matins.)*

Guenevere

Not meet again?

Arthur

No mortal meeting.

Guenevere

Alas!

Arthur

Nay, madam, nay, haply thou mayest
Be queen, when all the goodly knights I lost
In diverse quests and ventures will awake

From their long sleep, and form in heaven again
The King's Round Table, perfect at last, and there
With shining arms will joust in Christ's fair courts
For diamonds like suns and carcanets
Of little stars.

Guenevere

Ah, God, all the gall of the world takes not
The dreamer from his dreaming! Thou speakst fair,
But slowly, slowly through the air of time
The drops of life fall on eternity.

Arthur

Yea, they pass slowly, perhaps no man
Can count them, yet they pass. And when thou hast
Set down thy staff and book, and they have laid
Thee in cold sepulchre, thou shalt not stir
To note the passing years, nor count the moons,
For drums or tramlings or the utmost heat
And noise of human conflict cannot break
The mood and spirit of the dead.

Guenevere

My lord, tarry!
(*Horns and bugles sound outside.*)

Arthur

Lo! I leave in thee the fairest part
Of all my fair, sad past. Yet —

Guenevere

Tarry:

Arthur

I know not yet what orisons ye pray,
But beg thee 'member me, and if thou seest
Me nevermore again, pray for my soul.
Farewell. (*He goes.*)

Guenevere

My lord, my lord Arthur, do not leave me!
(*He looks back once and is gone.*)
I love thee too, thou wilt not leave me!
Take me with thee to Camelot and the court.

(She runs out after King Arthur.)

Arthur! Arthur!

(The chant in the chapel leaves off, and now the frightened sisters rush into the room. Sister Agatha stands at the head of the stairs. Enter the abbess. Outside there is a clatter of horses departing.)

Agatha

Mother!

Morwena

Yea, the queen hath a wild mood.

Agatha

O God, O God, King Arthur hath ridden away,
And she weeps after him like mad. There, there!
She hath torn off her veil, the other hand
Hath rent the emblem from her breast, snatched out
The Sacred Heart.

Sisters

Alas! Oh!

(Enter Guenevere. She drags her veil in her left hand. with her right she has torn off the Sacred Heart.)

Guenevere

Oh, I am lost! Curse me, mother, curse
You sisters, and let me die!

Morwena

Nay, daughter —

Guenevere

Nay, thou shalt not touch me. I am she,
That woman that gave up the world's lusts
For her spirit's health. And now I have trampled down
That shrine!

Morwena

Leave us, you sisters. My daughter, let God choose —

Guenevere

I have lost both kingdoms, O God, and now my soul
Is shipwrecked. Jesu, have mercy! Mother of God,
Be merciful!

(She falls toward the prie-dieu.)

ACT V

A year later. Same room in the convent of Boscastle. It is near dusk, but the afterglow lingers, and the garden and cloisters are filled with red light. Guenevere lies asleep on the Roman bench. The abbess and Sister Agatha attend her. On the right sit three nuns. Dag-onet hovers about the room. Sir Launcelot talks with the abbess.

Morwena

'Tis nigh four seasons gone since thou hast seen
Her. A little and thou'st been too late.
She tarryeth not much longer in this world.

Launcelot

How she lies faded, poor lady, like a rose
When the rough wind sucks the freshness from its
heart.

Morwena

That day my lord Arthur came and went,
That was the zenith of her spirit's star,
That day after vigils and hard fasts her blood
Burst bond and cried for Camelot and glory.
Then flesh fought spirit. Hardly she won, but lies
Here broken with the struggle as thou seest.
I know not if this may be well or no
To tear the heart-roots of your being out,
Seeking to be other than God made you.

Launcelot

Would God had either made us as we yearn
To be, or else had made us what we are
Without the yearning!

Morwena

She will soon waken, wait. Thou sayst, my lord,
King Arthur is slain, she hath had word of it.
What of Mordred, that vile traitor chaff
That maketh foul the wind?

Launcelot

Ah, madam, he is snatched from his base dealing
Here, he too is slain, and Camelot
Is but a den of plots and arms. Despair
Shadows the hearts of good men. Alas,
The glory of the realm of Logris
Is departed.

Dagonet

All day have horses' feet clicked by — 'tis knights
That ride to court.

Launcelot

Yea, boy, there be jousts and feasting there.
(*A distant bell sounds.*)

Agatha

Saint Necton's tide-bell, 'tis later than
I deemed.

Morwena

See how strangely the sun's red lingers yet,
As if 'twere loth to yield the free, hot course
To the subtle-working, grey night. Likewise
Meseems our lady the queen still doth glow
After her life's hot span, and her veins pulse
With the rich past. How faint and tender the bell!
O Death, how subtle art thou in thy coming,
But afterward long night and haply stars.

Agatha

Rather say that like the moon she burned
In beauty all the night of sin, and then
Did fade in the new day.

Morwena

Peace, Sir Launcelot! Sure I am grown foolish
Thinking on her, poor lady.

Launcelot

Nay, likewise all my thoughts have been on her.
Whether in joyless wood or when
The thin prow scudded o'er the midnight swell,
Or Breton thatches waited in the harbour,

In every land my memory sought her.

Dagonet

And I. 'Tis many songs I read of late
In this lone house, of ladies beautiful
That suffered and are dead. And always when
I read I thought of her, and said she too,
She shall be beautiful in rhyme till the world's
End.

Launcelot

Aye, and her name into men's thoughts shall bring
The peerless ventures and sweet courtesy
Of this the summer of all time. For still
Her soul is as her station sovran, and when
The wild sowing of man shall be gleaned and the world
be garnered
She shall be queen at fairer courts than these —

Morwena

Nay, nay, my lord, let not thy heart o'ersweep thee.
Daughter, thou spakest thoughtlessly, thou art
Yet young and thy young piety is hard.
Is there a moon, was't yesternight? This old
Head is so racked with care I mind me not.

Agatha

I know not either.

Dagonet

Yea, mother, 'tis but one night to the full.
Look! The sky stirs now faintly with light.

Morwena

Hush, she wakes. Sir Launcelot, go thou
Walk in the cloister. We will prepare
Her for thy coming when 'tis well.

Launcelot

Pray you be not o'erlong — I know not how much
Of this frail life she have.

(Exit Sir Launcelot.)

Guenevere (waking)

Ah, 'tis dusk! Even at this time it was

That in my sleep I dreamed of Camelot.

Morwena

Camelot, my daughter?

Guenevere

But yet somehow it was a brighter place
And newer city. The sun sank and the slim
Moon lifted her pale beauty into heaven,
And dome and turret glittered in the light.
Then Mary the Mother of God came and took
My hand, and her voice fell sweet upon my weary
Ear —

Morwena

Speak to her, boy.

Dagonet

Alas, I may not for looking on her face!
Hark, there is the nightingale, my lady, Look!
Too — the moon riseth!

Guenevere

The moon —

Dagonet

The moon like a white flame in the trees, like liquid
Silver in among the leaves. Mother,
I cannot speak! Oh, my lady! The moon!

Guenevere

Distantly rose Camelot out
Of the silver plain.

Dagonet

And the nightingales —

Guenevere

Aye, all the nightingales in Cameliard
Cannot sing my woes, nor every bird
That sings his tragic plaints of passionate
Mischance can wail my sorrows.

Morwena

Nay, madam, sit, thou hast not strength to stand.

Guenevere

I was a woman and I needed love,

I was a queen to long for courts about,
Strong lords and ladies and gay raiment.
I am a weary human thing that needeth
Rest. Rest is the thing we most do hunger
For and know it not. Sleep, sleep, it is
But the gateway of pure rest's abode. Nay, let
Me have sleep's sister, black-garbed death. For
queens

Like other women have strong need of death
At times — oh, I am childish grown —

Morwena

Madam, my daughter —

Guenevere

Whose spurs clink walking in the cloister there?

Morwena

One come to see thee and to say farewell.

Guenevere

Farewell, 'tis always farewell in this world.

Is it Sir Launcelot?

Morwena

Yea, daughter, he.

Guenevere

Let him enter.

(Enter Launcelot.)

How dost, Sir Launcelot? Art well? Whence comest?

Launcelot

From Fraunce, my lady. And thou?

Guenevere

Thou seest I have found peace.

In Fraunce this twelvemonth gone?

Launcelot

When the sly Mordred bore an open front,
With vassals and kinsmen I had saved the king.
But he would have it not. And I distraught
Got me to my father's land again.

Guenevere

And now?

Launcelot

Now having word of the king's death, I knew
The ravage and the spoil within this isle,
And hasted into boats and blew three days,
And drove into this tortured little harbour,
That thou mightst leave thy sorrows here and go
With me —

Morwena

With thee?

Guenevere

Thee?

Launcelot

The many-towered castle on the heights,
Below, a little Breton hill with trees
And slow white sheep, and farther west the grey
Rocks smoking in the sun at ebb-tide, heather
And pasture-bell upon the seawind mingling —

Guenevere

My lord, thou knowst through thee and me is this
Whole kingdom sore bestead, and the sails of the realm
Veered from the old lodestar of purity.
The Round Table is broke and many knights
Tasted the dolours of death through me and thee.
Therefore I pray thee now, Sir Launcelot,
Look thou not on me evermore. And well
As I have loved thee, I may not see thee
Again, for now mine eye it turneth not
To the worldward but to God, for my soul's health
Lest I be damned.

Dagonet

My lady, there be worse than thou now saints
In heaven.

Guenevere

Thou art o'erfond, child. Then, Sir Launcelot,
Much as I have loved thee, for Christ's sake I may
Not see thee. Therefore I pray that thou
Depart; and pray for me —

Launcelot

I have come far to see thee, but I will
Not trouble thee, poor lady, with fond words.
Sithence thou'lt have it so, I go, yet I
Sail never on the sea to Fraunce again
But to a hermitage, and make my prayers
For thy soul's rest and mine. I pray thee then,
Before I go, madam, kiss me once
And nevermore.

Guenevere

Nay, that may I never do —

Launcelot

Farewell.

Guenevere

And for our old love's sake, Sir Launcelot,
Do this; when I am dead, come thou with seven
Knights, and carry me to Glastonbury
Where my lord Arthur lieth. Pray God I have
Not power to see thee with my worldly eyes
Again for my soul's sake.

(He starts to go out.)

Morwena

She hath o'erspent her strength.

Dagonet

She sleeps.

Morwena

I know not if she wake again. Thou needst
Not go, Sir Launcelot.

Morwena

Weep not, my daughters, she hath fallen asleep
Gloriously.

Agatha

Yea, madam, Christ's mother hath ta'en her hand again.

Dagonet (falling on his knees)

Dead! Oh, my lady!

Launcelot

Nay, she doth sleep. Dead? Art thou gone?

Gone when thou art all mine at last tho late!
Nay, God's life, madam, she is not dead, or why
Drives the blood yet here in my heart! Thou'lt
wake?

Nay, dead, oh, dead — then all is dead
Forevermore!

Morwena

My lord —

Launcelot

Oh, then a long good night to you, my lady!

Good night.

(There comes the sound of knights clattering by and singing a catch.)

What ho, heigho, with bridle and spur!

Heigho, and away we ride,

For men do love, heigho, do love! —

Morwena

Who sings?

Agatha

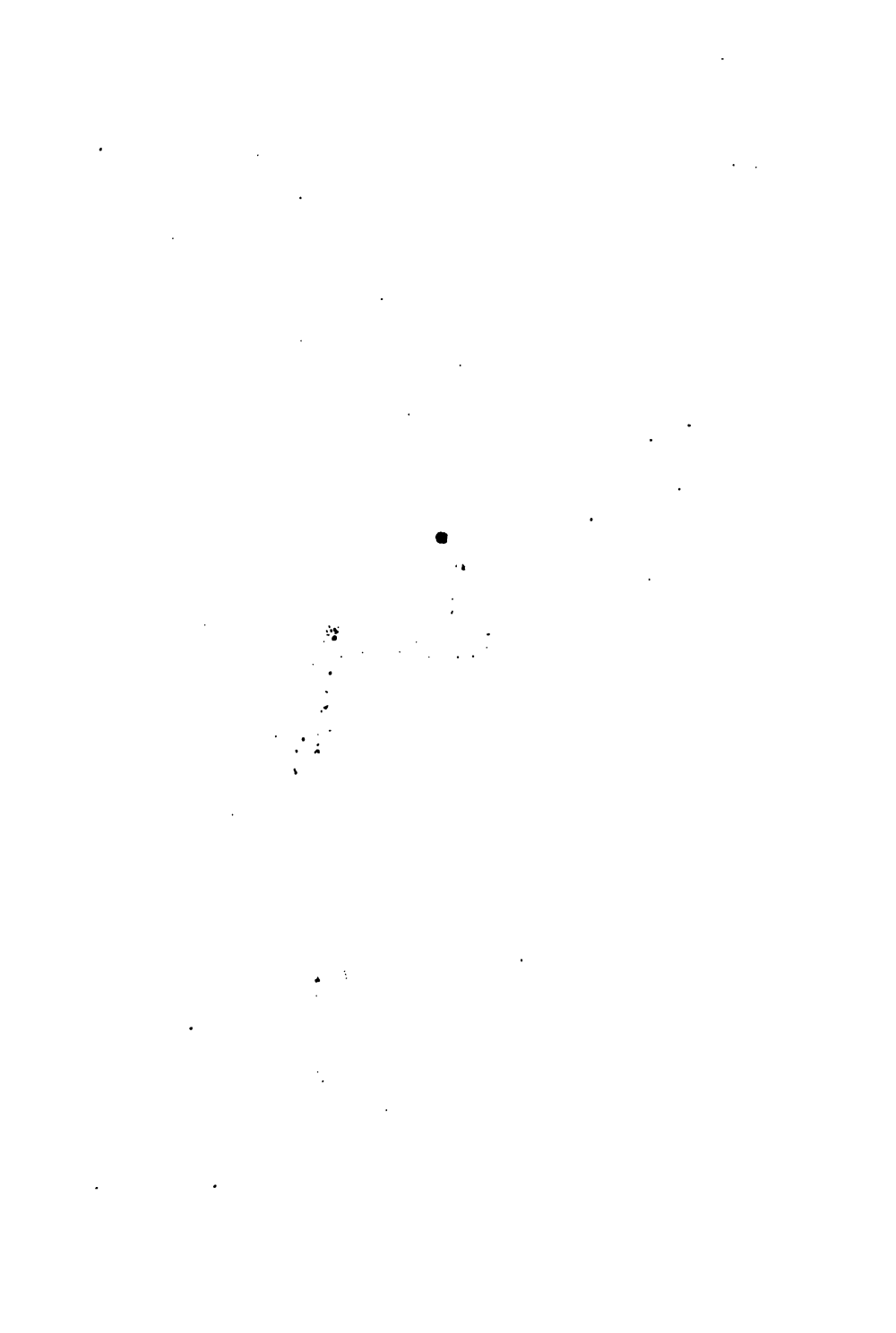
'Tis knights returned from Camelot and the feasts,
The new king, Constantine, is crowned.

SCENE II

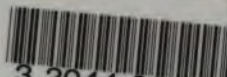
A wood near Glastonbury. The wood is dark and, save for a rustle of the leafage now and then, silent. Presently there comes a light through the trees, which brightens and brightens. The tramp of footsteps is heard growing gradually louder. Sir Launcelot and his seven knights enter with the queen's bier on their shoulders, and eight torches burning about her. Her head rests on a cushion, and on her breast is her crown. A pall of black samite bordered with gold lilies covers her body. The knights turn in behind a rocky mound, then reappear among the trees. Then as they go, every

now and then, their torches flash further and further away, smaller and smaller points of light amid the columns of the wood, till the last twinkle is gone and the blackness returns.

CURTAIN



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